

Introduction to Reality

A Study of Śrīgupta's Tattvavataṛrti with a Critical Edition and Annotated Translation

Introduction to Reality offers the first comprehensive study, critical edition, and annotated English translation of Śrīgupta's (c. 7th-8th century) Tattvavataṛrti. As the earliest known synthesis of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka metaphysics with the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti tradition of logic and epistemology, the Tattvavataṛrti marks a pivotal moment in the development of Indian Madhyamaka thought. Its central focus is the "neither-one-nor-many argument," later renowned as one of the five great Madhyamaka arguments for emptiness. An analysis of this line of reasoning reveals it to be, at its core, an attack on true unity: Śrīgupta rejects the possibility of an intrinsic nature by denying the existence of mereological simples, whether material or immaterial.

The Tattvavataṛrti also presents the earliest formulation of an influential threefold criterion for conventional reality, according to which whatever is conventionally real is dependently originated, causally efficacious, and satisfies our ordinary notions of existence and unity only when not subjected to critical analysis. This framework was central to later Madhyamaka-Yogācāra syntheses, particularly in the work of Śāntarakṣita and Kamalāśīla.

Śrīgupta's other important philosophical contributions are brought to light, including his case for the non-standard view that certain instances of enlightened cognition are necessarily both conceptual and veridical, challenging the widespread assumption in Buddhist thought that conceptually mediated cognition is invariably erroneous.

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78,50 €

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vorbestellbar, Erscheinungstermin ca. September 2026

Artikelnummer: 9780674305571

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-674-30557-1

Verlag: Harvard University Press

Erscheinungstermin: 15.09.2026

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2026

Serie: Harvard Oriental Series

Produktform: Gebunden

Seiten: 238

Format (B x H): 152 x 229 mm

